

# The Ghost That Oberlin Doesn't Believe In

Two Professors and an Amateur Sherlock Holmes Try to Fathom Mysterious Tappings, but College Town Conversation Still Dwells on "the Things We Can't Explain."

BY WINIFRED VAN DUZER.

O H shucks, we don't believe in ghosts! Nobody does. Imagination! Silly! Nobody believes in ghosts. That's why Oberlin, classic village two hours out of Cleveland, is treading lightly these days. It's why staid professors and students who are not staid, maids, matrons and boy scouts are passing over time-of-day amenities to meet with raised brows and silence. It's why no afternoon tea, no midnight spread, no simple coming-together outside a classroom door holds forth more than a minute without conversation on Things We Can't Explain. And it's why the old Evans home, on Elm st., is about as unpopular as anything could be, especially after nightfall and when the wind blows.

The Evans home has weathered the stress of time. Almost directly opposite the G. Frederick Wright place and next door to Professor George Hastings, it's been a landmark for thirty years. Changes have raced up and down the street; students have come and gone; the pine round by the side door has shot from a twig to a tree ever so much higher than the chimneys. Still the crumbling bricks cling together; the tottering cornices support the sagging roof. The Evans home is old—very old.

We don't believe in ghosts—mercy no! We don't believe in shrieks that come out of thin air and nothing but air; we don't believe in disembodied telegraph codes nor in fire that burns blue and doesn't scorch what it burns. Silly! The Evans home is old. That's probably why the windows rattle dimly for no reason at all; why chill, dark air blows through the rooms and why doors swing aimlessly to and fro. It's probably because the floor is warped and twisted that the boards creak suddenly. As for the lights—well!

Nobody in Oberlin believes in ghosts. IT—whatever IT is that's been spooking around in the wing of the Evans house—can be explained, of course. Mayor J. D. Yocom and his own special sleuth, Mr. Jack Walnright, have explained IT. Head of the college psychology department, Professor Raymond H. Stetson, has explained and so has Professor George Hastings, who shot IT one night. Even Misses Edith and Agnes Dixon, who live in the house, have explained. YET IT gambols on. Just won't be downed; laid, as it were. IT is an independent and persevering circumstance.

The Evans house, built when space rather than even temperature was the thing, rambles. It is three-storied; with long, staring windows and an attic which might harbor anything. There are verandas with white, spectral pillars under moss-grown roofs. There's a wing at the back where windows shrink under eaves, half hidden by the ragged, distorted pine tree. The wing is isolated. Like the attic, it might harbor anything. But we don't believe in ghosts!

"Of course," said Professor Hastings, "we don't believe in ghosts!" "Of course not!" I agreed. "Anyway why should there be a ghost in the old Evans home? It was built years ago—thirty years ago—and nothing extraordinary ever happened there. The Evans family moved away and the house has been rented. The Dixon sisters rent it. Nice quiet life they live. Nothing fantastic. No ghosts."

The Dixon sisters are librarians at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. They moved up from Wellington about five years ago. It was last July, soon after "Neil," the maid, became a member of their household that IT became active. "Neil" is from Michigan and colored. Once, so whispers rumor, romance wobbled into her life. But 'twas for only a little time. Romance gathered unto herself wings and flew away even as the man (also colored) of Neil's heart was gathered unto his fathers more or less spectacularly in a railroad wreck. Then Neil came to Oberlin.

"Nice quiet life they live," said Professor Hastings. "Wouldn't know they were there but for the knocking. Tap, tap! Every night. All night. Tap, tap! What is it? Well—"

For the purpose of discovering what it is Professor Hastings ventured forth one night. He ventured forth softly, slithering through shadows that lie dark and dismal between his own dooryard and the haun—that is the house. In his hand he carried a gun. Preparedness is a wonderful thing.

"Tap, tap!" "Hah!" challenged the professor. "Tap, tap!" It was as though invisible fingers rapped out a message from the realms of Over There. Steadily it went on, deviating only as the taps were long or short. Sometimes it seemed that the phantom fingers barely caressed material things; again they surely moved to anger, fiercely and heavily.

"Hah!" "Tap, tap!" "Crr-r-rk!" A bullet spoke. Silence. More silence. "Ah-ha," meditated the professor. "Twas a practical joke and I've frightened away the perpetrator!" Whereupon he retired to his house and bed. "Tap-tap: Tai



The Old Evans Home at Oberlin.

Again the spectral message. Cautiously he peered round the window curtain. The Evans home was dark and gloowering; it might have been uninhabited. Yet—there was a light in a window under the eaves? Strange! At such an hour why should there be a light? And was it an ordinary light? Or did it burn with a purplish hue, something like a will-o-the-wisp? Very strange! Professor Hastings dropped the curtain. The next day he moved his room over to the other side of the hall.

"The house," said Miss Edith Dixon, who lives there, "is not haunted! We don't believe in ghosts!" "Should say not!" I exclaimed indignantly.

"No. We've lived there five years or more and everything was all right until—well, it must have been in July. It commenced with a tapping. Tap-tap! Every night. Tap, tap! What is it? Well—"

"Neil—she's our maid—came here in the summer. Someone said something about a man who'd paid her attention. I never saw him. There was something about him rapping on the wall. I don't know. Why should a young man rap on the wall? And if he were in Oberlin why didn't someone see him?"

"This house is old. Very old. And old houses have an atmosphere, don't you think? Though we don't believe in ghosts!"

"It's a bit gloomy on dark days. The halls are dim. The big, dusty attic reeks with mold. Dust seems to settle 'round and lie deep. There's a continual restless voice in the attic. It's mice—may-

be. Doors slam. The jams seem to be sprung.

"All perfectly natural. Why shouldn't the wind blow? But there's the room in the wing—Neil's room. There's an air in there. I can't tell what it's like, exactly. You know what the air from a grave is—damp and dead? Well—! But that room, of course, is round on the northeast side. The sun doesn't get to it. It should be damp. Of course. "And the pine tree—that's outside the windows—it sighs and moans, you know. Pine trees—ugh! Of course," she interpolated, "we don't—any of us!—believe in ghosts!" "Heavens no!"

Professor Raymond H. Stetson, head of the college psychology department, is interested in the Evans home. He stopped clacking his typewriter to shake his head at me. The shake was dismal. "Absurd about the place being haunted!" said he. "We don't believe in ghosts!"

"Silly!" I agreed. "Yes. Being interested in psychic phenomena, however, of course I wondered. Yes. That's why I slept in the house—one night—two nights—several nights! Interest—that's all!"

"And no—er—ghost—appeared?" "Absurd! Toothache, pure and simple. Neil had the toothache. Ulcerated tooth. Got up in the night for peppermint and a hot flatiron. That's all!"

"We retired in a big, chilly bedroom. House is old—of course it's chilly. Not enough lights in old houses. Shadows! Tap-tap! It kept up all night. Tap-tap! It did annoy. You couldn't sleep.

You couldn't understand it. Of course the wind blew the pine against the wing. That was it, of course.

"Sleep came, long toward morning. It wasn't satisfactory. I'd just begun to dream when something cold and moist—clammy moist—wrapped round my face. It was unpleasant. Very unpleasant.

"Miss Dixon has a cat—a large, capable cat—who probably visits members of the household nocturnally and drags its cold, moist tongue round their faces. That was it. The cat. Unpleasant!" "Are there such things as ghosts?" I asked Professor of Psychology Stetson. "Well—er—we've never seen any," he replied.

"Hm. Do the dead come back?" "We don't know that they do."

"No. But there are things that we Don't Understand?" "Ah!" Professor Stetson who seems to reside in the historic library where G. Frederick Wright's "Bib-Sac" had its inception involuntarily glanced into corners where gloom lurked. He hunched his coat collar and shrugged his shoulders.

"There are things that we Don't Understand," he admitted. "But as for ghosts—well, nobody believes in ghosts! The maid had a toothache!"

"Couldn't have had a toothache since last July," I objected. "Oh as for the noises," said he, "they're probably the wind!" Thus spake science.

"We don't believe in ghosts!" Mr. Jack Walnright, the mayor's own special sleuth was emphatic. "No!"

"No. Bunk! There's probably a



draft through the left wing. The draft most likely veers into a long, low wall that seems to come from a great distance and end in a shriek. There's terror in the shriek. And sobbing moans. Ghostly! Wind; draft; that's all. "Wires are crossed, probably. Some electrical disturbance, we suppose, makes a blue fire in the room upstairs on the east side. Electricity would make a bright, blue light, shaped something like a letter 'S' though maybe it's like a question mark. It doesn't seem to last long—not long after midnight.

"I investigated. The affair really became quite frightful, you know, and Mayor Yocom called a conference. He asked me to work on it. It had to be settled!

"So I went over in the yard and waited. It was very dark. Along toward midnight it was darker than ever. I

waited expectantly. Not that I was afraid! "It must have been just about midnight. I'd begun to doze when I heard that rapping. Tap-tap! I looked 'round. There was a figure in the darkness. I was a tall figure. It was dark too—even against the shadows it was dark! I remembered the story about the railroad wreck. Tap-tap! The rapping went steadily on against the wall of the wing. I climbed up on the porch roof. Neil's room opens on the roof. I could see in the room all right—light as day it was! But a queer light—blue and it sort of burned all over the room without heat or blaze! Neil was sitting up in bed fast asleep—sheep me if she wasn't fast asleep and both eyes closed and that look on her face of deep slumber and nothing else in the world! She'd listen for the tap-tap and then she'd reach out and answer it; knock on the floor with her bare knuckles, tap-tap! Then the figure in the garden—the figure darker than the shadows—would tap back and she'd answer. Yesir, believe me or not! It was uncanny!

"Of course Neil was only tapping in her sleep. I'm satisfied about that. I'd've proved it; was going to kick out a panel in her door and flash her. But what's the use? We spread wires—charged wires—up and down the yard and through the house. Did we catch anything? We did not. Never could dope out the figure darker than the shadows. It got away. It always got away. How? I don't know. The yard was wired and there was light on the street. Neil didn't know; said she didn't know. Well!

"Of course I'm not mystified. Silly! We don't believe in ghosts!"

"Of course not!"

"Should say so!" Yet the moans; shrieks of terror; a midnight light that burns blue; the chill, dank breath of the grave. Is an unhappy and love-lorn spirit seeking recognition from her whom it knew and loved in life? Is the ghost of the man who came to his end in a railroad wreck haunting the molding Evans home where Neil lives?

Who is going to answer? For of course we don't believe in ghosts. Nobody does!

## With Charlie Chaplin, Truly Shattuck, Mabel Normand and Francis Bushman at a Coast Prize Fight

(What grand opera or the charity ball is to society in the east, the boxing match seems to be on the California coast. Miss Paul, a Cleveland girl, has written her impressions of a match at Venice, California.)

BY PAULINE PAUL.

SOMEWHERE else in the world there was entertainment. Somewhere else there were artists—lights—beautiful women. But for those who crowded the Venice auditorium there was boxing—and it was enough.

Was there ever, anywhere else in the world, such a crowd? People whose names are spoken a thousand times every day in all the tongues of the universe. Men whose faces are better known than the President's and whose incomes are about five times as great. Women—oh, many women!—fashionable, famous, lovely, rubbing shoulders with the sporting fraternity and thrilling to the joy of battle. And in a ringside seat, watching with bated breath, Mabel Normand, clad

in black velvet with white fur at her wrists and throat and hair like a Santa Monica sunset. Most wonderful girl in the world she is to some—beloved of all—and at her side Francis Bushman with a light in his eyes.

Evidently something was very wrong with the first match. Two nice boys danced around in the middle of the roped square, shying at each other, but seeming to be very friendly withal. The auditorium built out over the sea trembled to the shock of the waves; rolling unrest, like answering tide, swept the audience. The referee said something and the nice boys went away. Someone said they were taken out because they couldn't or wouldn't fight. I didn't just understand.

The manager of the Venice Amateur Athletic Club made an announcement that the next bout, between Tony Rose and Kid Bell, would be refereed by Joe Rivers, whom he called the Mexican Marvel. Like everyone else, I had heard of Joe Rivers. I wondered how it felt to be boasting a scrap in the place where he had also fought. He was very nice about it, though,

and the Man Who Takes Me Places said that he is better at his own game, which I suppose means fighting.

I had a chance to look around between this bout and the last one.

Charlie Chaplin, looking like a spoiled kid, without a vestige of cane or hat, seemed awfully interested. Close to him was Truly Shattuck with the smile that has won her thousands of friends, and near them sat Ward McFadden, Harry Smith, a decade ago idol of ring fans and middleweight champion of the world, was there. I fancy he has grown stouter with the years. It doesn't seem to trouble him.

Everybody seemed to wait for the next bout. The air was charged with expectancy; people gripped chair arms and leaned far toward the ring. The Most Wonderful Girl smuggled into her white furs and—did she move just a bit nearer Bushman? He was too interested in her to show much interest in the bout. And after a few minutes the real event was announced. "Cyclone" Strohecker and "Battling" Ortega were to fight.

Strohecker is blond and taller than the other, but Ortega! That slim body, with the muscles sliding under the skin like brown satin, made one think of the battle for life when the world was new. The overhand cat's paw jab, swinging when least expected! The tiger play of shoulders, and the softness and grace of motion!

Ortega played with the big fellow in the first round. No matter how hard Strohecker tried to use weight against speed it was useless—speed won.

I wonder, do women ever attain such perfection of figure? There were three more rounds. In the last there wasn't even advice. Excepting for the crackling roar of the sea and the regular pad-pad! in the ring the auditorium was absolutely silent. Then, just before the bell rang, a little gasp, half sob, escaped from the Most Wonderful Girl.

Ortega flashed the victor's smile when it was over. He was tired, for like the true artist, he had given his best. He wants to make a national reputation—here's the hope he succeeds!